

Der Gute Lehrer

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A strong Erkältung is not normally a catalyst for a friendship and fruitful collaboration, but it seems to have been instrumental in my own with Professor Karl Heinz Schmitz. In 2002, on one of his first visits to Glasgow, he gave a talk at the Department of Architecture in the University of Strathclyde. That evening at dinner with colleagues, we asked him if he would care to try a 'hot toddy'¹ to alleviate a cold that he was suffering from. After explaining what a hot toddy was and describing its intended medicinal effects, he agreed to participate in the experiment. It took two hot toddies to alleviate his cold that evening and during this time, I had the pleasure of getting to know him. I quickly discovered our mutual admiration for the work of Karljosef Schattner, with whom Karl-Heinz had collaborated closely and who I had met a few years previously in Eichstätt. This was to become for me an important architectural pilgrimage destination I would visit with students on several further occasions. On that evening in Glasgow with Karl-Heinz however, I recall an articulate and humorous architect who shared his affection for working with students and his deep love and knowledge of architecture with great erudition (in English to my relief.) Those first impressions have proven to be remarkably consistent in the intervening 14 years.

I was privileged to be invited to attend design reviews and to give talks at the Bauhaus University in Weimar and consequently Karl-Heinz became a regular visitor to Strathclyde and more recently, to the Mackintosh School of Architecture at the Glasgow School of Art. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to be with him with family, friends, colleagues, students (his and mine), guests and teaching assistants. We have met in cities together, collaborated on student projects and I have been on the receiving end of his and his wonderful wife Anna's hospitality in their beautiful house at Am Horn.

Today, I write also as a member of 'the coalition of the motivated'² - the informal pre-Brexit collaboration formed by Andras Palffy, Ferruccio Izzo, Peter Cody, myself and Karl Heinz, specifically to collaborate on student-centred, research-focused design projects which explore contemporary architecture in (mostly) Historic European City contexts. There is a great mutual respect and enjoyment of each other's ideas and company and we now see this group prophetically as the model for all post-Brexit cross-European activities!

I have learned much from Karl-Heinz both as an architect and as a teacher. What is it about him that makes him so good? For one thing, he thinks in both concepts and details - that crucial architectural skill of oscillating between the macro and the micro scales that all architects must develop in order to realize buildings of rigour and quality. His built work displays an ability to address the urban scale as well as the detail. They receive the visitor hospitably at that crucial moment when they come face to face with the architecture - where quality (or the lack thereof) is most keenly experienced. His architecture reveals an interest in precision, in (non-romantic) craft, in structure, light, spatial contrast and human scale. Like Schattner

and others before him, he shows a convincing attitude to the issue of working in a contemporary manner within the historic city or town, revealing the layers of history and meaning to subsequent generations. As a result, his buildings are fresh, articulate and intelligent. These are buildings worth measuring and drawing themselves, not least to discover the exact proportions of each part and how they are brought together. They are also a great pleasure to be in.

He is a consummate and natural teacher. His approach to architectural education within the design studio is similarly restrained and informed by a clear understanding of the role of the different learning environments of the university and the professional studio. Projects are guided by both ancient as well as contemporary programmes; locations are invariably challenging and in stimulating parts of the European City and project descriptions combine an intellectual rigour of the subject in question with an enthusiasm that comes from the excitement of a new architectural adventure. His students are encouraged to draw articulately, unambiguously, unsentimentally and in a highly architectural manner. The monochromatic figure ground plan, section and perspective are favourites and they have proved remarkably versatile in revealing the DNA of each project over the intervening years. Simple physical models at an urban and 1:50 scale complete the material required to participate in a serious and engaging discourse on the work in question.

Those design reviews are characterized by a generally calm and polite atmosphere (from a Glaswegian perspective at least!). There are respectful exchanges between staff, guests and students which is occasionally interrupted by a humorous insight or observation. Critical comment is focused but not laboured and praise is not over emphasised. "I like your project" could be seen as the ultimate compliment. The impression given is that any student who has taken their project seriously and invested time on it is rewarded with a proper discussion on their work, whether it is fully resolved or not. There is, in other words, great respect for the student both as author and as person. It is palpable how much mutual respect exists in his studio and how that contributes to both the high standard of architectural output as well as long standing relationships with students and assistants.

And so I return each year to Weimar to be with Karl Heinz, his assistants and his students. Not just because it is a beautiful town. It is that. Not just because of his and Anna's hospitality. That is always there. Not just because of the reputation of the Bauhaus University. That remains. Not even because I get to travel through Berlin en route and visit my mother in law. She is still there. I return each year because I miss being with him there and because I know I will learn something each time I come back. To paraphrase his own moving tribute to Karljosef Schattner in the Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag; *Ich war schliesslich nach Weimar gekommen, um etwas zu lernen*. When I am with Karl Heinz I feel I am a student of architecture once more as well as a colleague and friend and I feel my knowledge and understanding about architecture and teaching is being expanded each time we are together. For that and for architectural adventures still to come, I would like to thank him deeply.

END

References

1. Nigel Slater's classic hot toddy recipe:
Put 1 teaspoonful of honey and a measure of whisky in a mug or heatproof glass. Add two cloves and half a cinnamon stick then top up with just-of-the-boil water. Stir in a slice of lemon and just enough lemon juice to balance the sweetness of the honey. Drink as soon as it doesn't burn your lips.
the guardian.com
2. The coalition comprises:
Bauhaus Universität, Weimar, UCD Dublin, TU Wien, Federico II, University of Naples and the Mackintosh School of Architecture, The Glasgow School of Art.